



LEIPOA OCELLATA, Gould.

Ocellated Leipoa.

Leipoa ocellata, Gould in Proc. of Zool. Soc., October 13, 1840.

Ngow, Aborigines of the lowland; *Ngów-oo*, of the mountain districts of Western Australia.

Native Pheasant, Colonists of Western Australia.

THIS beautiful bird is among the most interesting of the novelties which the little-explored regions of Australia have lately unfolded to us; since, by its discovery, and a knowledge of its habits, we are enabled to assign to its proper family (the *Megapodinæ*) the singular species figured under the name of *Talegalla Lathamii*.

The Ocellated Leipoa appears to be more peculiarly suited for a plain and open country than for the tangled brush; and it is most curious to observe how beautifully the means employed by Nature for the reproduction of the species is adapted to the situations it is destined to inhabit. A sketch of its economy, as far as it has yet been ascertained, has been sent me by Mr. John Gilbert, and is here given in his own words:

“The following account of the habits, manners, and nidification of this bird have been detailed to me by G. Moore, Esq., Advocate-General, Mr. Armstrong, the aboriginal interpreter, and some of the more intelligent natives of Western Australia. Mr. Moore saw a great many of them about sixty miles north of Perth; but its most favourite country appears to be the barren sandy plains of the interior, 100 miles north and east of York. It is a ground bird, never taking to a tree except when closely hunted; when pursued it will frequently run its head into a bush, and is then easily taken. In its actions and manners it is very like the domestic fowl. Its food generally consists of seeds and berries. It has a mournful note, very like that of a pigeon, but with a more inward tone. The eggs are deposited in a mound of sand, the formation of which is the work of both sexes: the natives say they scratch up the sand for many yards around, forming a mound of about three feet in height; the inside being constructed of alternate layers of dried leaves, grasses, &c., among which the eggs are deposited to the number of twelve and upwards, and covered up by the birds as laid; or, as the natives express it, ‘the countenances of the eggs are never visible.’ The bird never sits upon the eggs; but when she has laid her number the whole are covered up, after which the mound of sand resembles an ant’s nest. The eggs are hatched by the heat of the sun’s rays, the vegetable lining of the hillock retaining sufficient warmth during the night: the eggs are deposited in layers, no two eggs being suffered to lie without a division. They are about the size of a fowl’s egg, and are white, very slightly tinged with red. The natives are exceedingly fond of them, and rob the mounds two or three times in a season; they judge of the probable number of eggs in the heap by the quantity of feathers lying around. If these are abundant, they know the hillock is full, when they immediately open it and take the whole; upon which the bird will again commence laying, to be robbed a second time, and will frequently lay a third time. Upon questioning one of the men attached to Mr. Moore’s expedition, he gave me a similar account of its habits and mode of incubating; adding that in all the mounds they opened they found ants almost as numerous as in an ant-hill, and that in many instances that part of the mound surrounding the lower portion of the eggs had become so hard, they were obliged to chip round them with a chisel to get them out: the insides of the mounds were always hot.”

Captain Grey, of the 83rd Regiment, who has just returned from his expedition to the north-west coast, has also furnished me with the following information respecting its range, &c.: “The farthest point north,” says this gentleman, “at which I have seen the breeding-places of this bird, is Gantheaume Bay. The natives of King George’s Sound say the same, or a nearly allied species, exists in that neighbourhood. I have never fallen in with its nests but in one description of country, viz. where the soil was dry and sandy, and so thickly wooded with a species of dwarf *Leptospermum*, that if you stray from the native paths, it is almost impossible to force your way through. In these close scrubby woods small open glades occasionally occur, and here the Ngów-oo constructs its nest, a large heap of sand, dead grass and boughs, at least nine feet in diameter, and three feet in height: I have seen them even larger than this. Upon one occasion only I saw eggs in these nests; they were placed some distance from each other, and buried in the earth. I am not sure of the number, but the account given by the natives led me to believe that at times large numbers are found.”

The Ocellated Leipoa is altogether a more slender and elegantly formed bird than the Wattled Talegalla, and moreover differs from that bird in having the head and neck thickly clothed with feathers, and in being adorned with a beautifully variegated style of colouring.

Head and crest blackish brown; neck and shoulders dark ash grey; the fore part of the former, from the chin to the breast, marked by a series of lanceolate feathers, which are black with a white stripe down the centre; back and wings conspicuously marked with three distinct bands of greyish white, brown and black near the tip of each feather, the marks assuming an ocellate form, particularly on the tips of the secondaries; primaries brown, their outer webs marked with zigzag lines of darker brown; rump and upper tail-coverts brownish grey, the feathers of the latter transversely marked with two or three zigzag lines near their tip; all the under surface light buff, the tips of the flank feathers barred with black; tail blackish brown, broadly tipped with buff; bill black; feet blackish brown.

The figures are about two-thirds of the natural size.